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VIGO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY REFERENCE SERVICE:
A SURVEY OF HOW IT RELATES TO THE NEEDS
OF COMMUNITY OPINION LEADERS

by

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I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Vigo County Public Library, hereafter referred to as VCPL, was constructed in 1906 in Terre Haute, Indiana. It is located a few blocks from the heart of the city and is within the immediate area of Indiana State University. The VCPL defines itself and its purposes as the Community Information Center providing numerous services to meet the varied needs of its patrons.

Residents of Vigo County have access to both print and nonprint materials as well as equipment essential in utilizing these materials. Staff professionals of diversified backgrounds share in the selection of materials, thereby striving to provide a well-balanced collection. The library extends itself to all income groups, minority groups, community education groups, occupational groups, and interest groups. One group, community opinion leaders, was selected for this study.

II. OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was to assess the use of the VCPL reference service by the community opinion leaders of Vigo County. The term, community opinion leaders, shall be defined and delimited in this paper as those persons holding such leadership positions as to enable them to influence others by their verbal statements and overt actions. Examples of persons comprising this group are the city councilmen, county sheriff, police chief, mayor, newspaper editors and

reporters, and radio and television personnel. Both elected and appointed political leaders are included in this select group.

III. INSTRUMENTATION AND PROCEDURE

A cover letter and questionnaire were sent to one-hundred people in Vigo County holding influential positions of community leadership. Out of one-hundred questionnaires disseminated, forty-eight (48 percent) were returned and incorporated into this study.

Appendix A contains the cover letter accompanying each questionnaire to establish rapport with the people and to explain the purpose of the study. Appendix B illustrates the questionnaire, while Appendix C shows the tabulated results. The questionnaire was designed to evoke responses pertaining to specific facets of reference service, utilization, facilities, and to elicit suggestions for improvement. A self-addressed, stamped envelope was included with each questionnaire.

Although questionnaires were a primary source of information, personal interviews with Mr. Ed Howard, Director of the VCPL, and Mrs. Vula Malooley, Director of Reference Services contributed much information necessary to conduct this study. Personal use of the reference area, observation, and close scrutiny of materials and services also aided in the evaluation.

IV. REFERENCE SERVICES PROVIDED COMMUNITY LEADERS

The following information includes use of service, information requested, information dispersal, and customized services.

Frequency of Use

The first question of the survey asked how often the respondents used the reference service. Six persons (13 percent) stated they used the services weekly, twenty-one (44 percent) monthly, seventeen persons (35 percent) rarely, and four persons (8 percent) never. The writer assumes that two persons who checked "never" misinterpreted this question, for they responded to the remaining questions and indicated use of the services throughout the remaining questionnaire.

Type of Information Requested

Question three called for multiple responses and elicited the type of information requested from the VCPL reference services. Twenty-two responses were for statistical information, twenty-one for current information, nineteen for historical information, sixteen for political information, thirteen for biographical information, eight for bibliographical information, and ten persons cited other types of information as listed in Appendix C. Since current information is one of two types most frequently requested, an extensive newspaper file is maintained. Political information and a local history file are also constantly updated. Other

requested information is located in various areas of the reference collection.

Bibliographies are prepared and sent by mail or media van to the person initiating the request. In-depth research is occasionally requested by community opinion leaders. The depth of this type of customized research is synonymous with customer satisfaction.

Methods of Information Dispersal

Question two, a multiple response question elicited information about the modes by which this group received information. Twenty-seven persons indicated information via telephone, twenty-six indicated self-service in the library, twenty-six in the library with staff assistance, fifteen by VCPL information releases or publications, six by the staff in the community, and six in response to mail requests.

Because many leaders utilized services by frequenting the library itself, at least one reference librarian (not involved with telephone calls) is available to serve them at all times. Since the telephone is also used extensively for information, one reference librarian is assigned to telephone requests during all hours in which the library is open.

Vigo County Public Library information releases and publications were cited as the means by which fifteen leaders received information. Selected materials deemed important to the opinion leaders by Mr. Howard are immediately forwarded to appropriate leaders. In-depth information beyond the

ready reference type question and Xeroxed items are generally mailed, but if a rapid response is necessary, information is delivered directly to the requester by the VCPL media van.

In conclusion of question two, the staff also assumes a consultant role. They go out into the community to meet with individuals and groups to arrange for programs; thus, information is provided Vigo County opinion leaders on an "out-person" basis.

Indiana Information Retrieval System

INDIRS is used between thirty and forty times per month by all library patrons. In question four, eight of the community leaders stated they made use of this service. According to Mrs. Malooley, the above usage justifies cost for it not only provides current information but saves professional time in searching for the information.

Teletype Services

Only two of the respondents to question five stated that they used teletype (TWX) services. Mrs. Malooley informed the writer that usually a reference librarian performs the actual use of TWX equipment, not the patron himself; thus, it is difficult to determine the frequency of use for this group. The teletype network is connected to the state library which in turn searches other public and university libraries for the information. This service provides information beyond the immediate confines of the VCPL.

Customized Services

When community leaders visit the reference area, they have the total reference collection available to them.

Professional help is available upon request. Staff personnel stated that radio, television, and newspaper persons visit the library frequently as they have special permits allowing them privileged parking in no parking zones.

Community leaders may also borrow any of the VCPL's reference materials upon request. This particular service is utilized several times each week by this group.

V. EVALUATION OF REFERENCE SERVICES

In this section, services are discussed in two parts: (1) positive factors, and (2) negative factors.

Positive Factors

Question eight asked the community leaders to note facets of the reference service which they felt were outstanding. Twenty-three of the twenty-eight persons (82 percent) responding to this question stated the staff is outstanding. Typical responses were that the staff is friendly, helpful, courteous, interested, and knowledgeable. See Appendix C for additional statements.

A sufficient number of staff are available to meet patrons' needs at all times. Six professional librarians and additional student help all service the public. Two

librarians are on duty at all times and during rush hours, three assist patrons. It was not surprising that the questionnaire cited the reference staff as the most outstanding asset of the total reference service area. Appendix C contains additional single responses to other assets of the service.

The questionnaire revealed that most opinion leaders are using reference services. Through these leaders, the general public is also being indirectly served, e.g., when information is obtained by a television broadcaster and he transmits his message to thousands of people, they in turn are being served by the VCPL.

A wide variety of materials are provided to try and meet the specific needs and requests of this group such as INDIRS, TWX, periodicals, bibliographies, encyclopedias, newspapers, indexes, directories, maps and atlases, handbooks and manuals, dictionaries, almanacs, yearbooks, biographies, and a wide variety of special collections.

A noteworthy customized service is the VCPL information releases and publications which Mr. Howard feels is pertinent to individual opinion leaders. These releases are to enable this group to be well-informed in order to make intelligent decisions on key issues affecting Vigo County residents; the anticipated results being that the public is also kept abreast of how other counties and states are coping with their problems via the news media leaders.

Newspaper clipping files are an important service to Vigo County leaders for readily accessible current information. Teletype and INDIRS services provide current materials and statistics.

Another positive factor of service offered community leaders is the open access and reference material loan policy. This personalized service, used by this group (see Appendix C) affords them maximum accessibility. Speed and accuracy are of utmost importance and deeply appreciated by this group as indicated in the questionnaire results. A telephone service and the media van delivery are two additional specialized examples of VCPL's philosophy in action.

A wide variety of one-to-one contacts are available to opinion leaders: telephone services, staff assistance in the library, and staff into the community. Patrons interested in planning a program may request staff to assist them with the program planning, arranging for facilities, securing speakers, scheduling films, etc.

Of the forty-six persons responding to question six, eight (18 percent) stated the present location of the VCPL had a negative influence on their use, thirteen (28 percent) a positive influence, and twenty-five persons (54 percent) no influence. This question indicated the library location is not a determining factor, probably since it is located on the fringe of the business area and within walking distance of many offices.

The writer personally evaluated the collection in regard to size, arrangement, and selection. At least seven evaluation tools including the Public Library Catalog are regularly reviewed for new publications. The writer checked the collection against "Reference Books of 1972" in Library Journal, and Winchell's Guide to Reference Books, and found most recommended, pertinent sources available in the reference collection. It was also evaluated against Katz' reference collection criteria in Introduction to Reference Work: Vol. 1, Basic Information Sources. The collection meets ALA Basic Standards for Public Libraries and contains all basic encyclopedias, dictionaries, and sources in most areas to meet needs of the opinion leaders. As a result of specific requests, much selecting and purchasing are determined by local needs.

Questions asked by this group frequently require the use of such tools as the Reader's Guide, New York Times Index, United States Government publications, and the current newspaper clipping file, all of which are available at the VCPL.

Negative Factors

Question nine of the survey asked the community leaders what were the greatest hindrances in their use of the library. Of those responding, ten stated "none," eight stated the parking problem, six stated finding the need for service, and two

were unhappy with the location. Single responses can be found in Appendix C. The writer concurs with the eight respondents about the parking problem. No parking zones plus university students taking all other available space within blocks are surely a detriment to library use. Most patrons must park blocks away. The library director and reference staff also feel that this has a definite influence on services.

When asked in question seven about physical factors within the library influencing use of the reference area, of the forty-seven persons responding, five (11 percent) stated the physical factors had a positive influence, five (11 percent) stated the factors had a negative influence, and thirty-seven (78 percent) no influence.

Question ten asked the community opinion leaders to suggest ways of improving VCPL reference services. Of the ten suggestions, seven pertained to physical facilities including air conditioning, a one-level building, and a new building. Other single responses are contained in Appendix C. The writer agrees that the antiquated facilities in the reference area are not suitable for effective utilization of the service. There is no quiet area in the reference section as the informational service area is also part of this immediate area. Telephone calls, talking, and operational noise make it difficult to concentrate and read. Uncomfortable, cumbersome furniture, limited space in the

reference area, and the absence of carpeting also hinder peak efficiency.

Extended reference service and library hours on Sunday afternoons probably would increase reference service. If the budget allowed, these additional hours would be an added convenience to the local leaders.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

With the aid of forty-eight questionnaire returns, a careful scrutiny was made of the VCPL reference services. The writer tabulated the survey responses to assess how the service is being utilized by the Vigo County opinion leaders. Services were then analyzed to determine if they are meeting the needs of the group.

As indicated by the questionnaires, the most positive responses were for the reference librarians. Question eleven (see Appendix C) illustrates this point. The collection also elicited many positive responses. Sufficient reference tools are available, current, and accessible. The variety and customizing of services prove to be another high point in this area.

The responses brought out the greatest detriments of the services to be parking and physical factors. Few persons responded negatively to the collection, staff, and the services; therefore, it is justifiable to conclude that although the reference services of the VCPL are outstanding, improved parking and facilities would tend to make the services more efficient and effective.

APPENDIX A: COVER LETTER

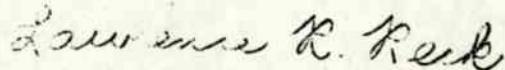
November 1, 1973

Dear Community Leader:

With the cooperation of Mr. Ed Howard, Director of the Vigo County Public Library, I am conducting a survey of citizens in leadership roles in Vigo County to evaluate the use of the VCPL reference services.

Attached is a brief questionnaire and a self-addressed envelope. I would appreciate your completing the form and returning it to me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Lawrence R. Reck
220 Kean Lane
Terre Haute, Ind. 47803

LRR/mms
Enc.

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

DIRECTIONS: Please check the appropriate response(s) or write in information which best describes your use of the reference services of the Vigo County Public Library. (Refer to main library only, not branches.)

1. How often do you use the VCPL reference services?
 A. frequently (weekly) C. rarely
 B. occasionally (monthly) D. never
2. By which mode(s) do you receive information?
 A. in library, self service E. mail, in response to request
 B. in library, VCPL staff assistance F. VCPL information releases or publications
 C. telephone G. other _____
 D. VCPL staff out in community
3. What types of information do you request from reference services?
 A. political D. historical
 B. statistical E. biographical
 C. bibliographical F. current information
 G. other _____.
4. Do you request or use INDIRS (Indiana Information Retrieval System)?
 A. yes B. no
5. Do you request or use teletype (TWX) services?
 A. yes B. no
6. Is the present location of the VCPL a positive or negative factor in your use of the reference services?
 A. positive
 B. negative
 C. neither
7. Do physical factors within the library (space, furniture, arrangement, etc.) influence your use of the library reference services?
 A. positive influence
 B. negative influence
 C. neither
8. Note facets of the reference service which you feel are outstanding:

9. What do you feel are the greatest hindrances in your use of the service?

10. What recommendations could you suggest to improve VCPL reference services to better meet your needs?

11. Additional comments: _____

(Continue on back if desired)

APPENDIX C: RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

DIRECTIONS: Please check the appropriate response(s) or write in information which best describes your use of the reference services of the Vigo County Public Library. (Refer to main library only, not branches.)

1. How often do you use the VCPL reference services?
6 A. frequently (weekly) 17 C. rarely
21 B. occasionally (monthly) 4 D. never
2. By which mode(s) do you receive information?
26 A. in library, self service 6 E. mail, in response to request
26 B. in library, VCPL staff assistance 15 F. VCPL information releases or publications
27 C. telephone 1 G. other See page 18.
6 D. VCPL staff out in community
3. What types of information do you request from reference services?
16 A. political 19 D. historical
22 B. statistical 13 E. biographical
8 C. bibliographical 21 F. current information
 10 G. other See page 18.
4. Do you request or use INDIRS (Indiana Information Retrieval System)?
8 A. yes 38 B. no
5. Do you request or use teletype (TWX) services?
2 A. yes 44 B. no
6. Is the present location of the VCPL a positive or negative factor in your use of the reference services?
13 A. positive
8 B. negative
25 C. neither
7. Do physical factors within the library (space, furniture, arrangement, etc.) influence your use of the library reference services?
5 A. positive influence
5 B. negative influence
37 C. neither
8. Note facets of the reference service which you feel are outstanding:
See page 18.

9. What do you feel are the greatest hindrances in your use of the service?
See page 18.

10. What recommendations could you suggest to improve VCPL reference services to better meet your needs?
See page 18.

11. Additional comments: See page 18.
(Continue on back if desired)

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE (Continued)

1. Two responses indicating "never" answered remaining questions and indicated use of reference services.
2. Part G, "other" listed no additional mode of receiving information. One person did not respond to this question.
3. Part G, "other" responses were: Burns Legal Statistics (2); telephone directory; directories; films; genealogical; a variety of topics; no statement appearing (3). Four persons responded to no part of the third question.
4. Two persons did not respond to this question.
5. Two persons did not respond to this question.
6. Two persons did not respond to the sixth question.
7. One person made no response to this question.
8. Twenty persons did not respond. Twenty-three persons commented on the staff: helpful and cooperative (16); prompt (4); courteous (3); knowledgeable (2); interested; professional; outstanding; quality. This list contains multiple responses from the twenty-three people. Five persons responded with multiple answers and indicated the following: INDIRS and TWX (2); ample supply of materials (2); easy to locate; films; Xerox; newspaper clippings; and easy to locate.
9. Nineteen persons did not respond to this question. Of those responding, ten stated "none," eight stated that parking was a problem, and two were unhappy with the location. Individual responses included: myself; not especially productive for my fields; and use of Indiana State University reference service.

The remaining six responses were related to the lack of need for reference service and not finding sufficient time in the day to partake of the services.

10. Multiple responses were given for this question. Relating to physical aspects, the following answers were recorded: new building (2); new building in a different location; new location with new facilities; new facility on one level; more space; and improved facilities would also benefit us. Other responses called for: better parking (2); need for additional hours on weekends (2); trained genealogist on duty; full-time accredited librarian during open hours; and work closely with Cunningham Library (Indiana State University) so services are not duplicated.
11. Responses to this question are not grouped together but each is listed individually.

Toot the library's horn louder. I believe our VCPL staff is outstanding and a group of whom we can be proud. The director is a wonderful person. A very congenial, knowledgeable staff, and most helpful and cooperative. I feel the library staff does an excellent job in all areas; I especially believe the film director and VCPL director are a great asset to the library. The staff is courteous and helpful in locating material. Easy access would help. One-level building would help. The library has good facilities but we do not use them. Although I have access to the ISU library, the attitude of the VCPL staff is more conducive to utilization especially in areas where I need assistance.

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PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

Mr. Ed Howard, Director, Vigo County Public Library.

Ms. Vula Malooley, Director, Reference Services, Vigo County Public Library.

(Dr. Reck is Associate Professor of Education, Indiana State University)